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MOUNTAIN WELL — Rollin Humber, president of the Fern Valley Water Company, Idyllwild, and Claude Drummond, maintenance man, test the initial water from the first well ever drilled for the water company. The well was drilled to 245 feet, much of it through solid granite—to tap an underground stream, that strangely enough is running uphill to Strawberry Creek at the well location. The pump is now pumping from the 120 foot level. Amount of water is as yet undetermined, but it is in excess of five inches.

Mountain Well Taps Stream Going Uphill

IDYLLWILD—With the drilling of its first well, the Fern Valley Mutual Water Company has almost doubled its present water supply. The well has been drilled near the upper part of Strawberry Creek, on the property of the Strong and Dickinson Company.

According to Rollin Humber, president of the water company, the additional supply should provide all domestic water users with a sufficient supply even during severe dry years.

In the past, the company has gathered its water from several streams running through the district. The recent drought conditions have lowered this supply to below the minimum requirements.

The well was located by V. L. Cameron of Elsinore who theorized that a number of underground streams criss-crossed through the San Jacinto mountains.

These streams, Cameron maintained, are pushed up from below, and are not directly dependent upon rainfall or snow. It is his belief that many of these underground currents are hot.

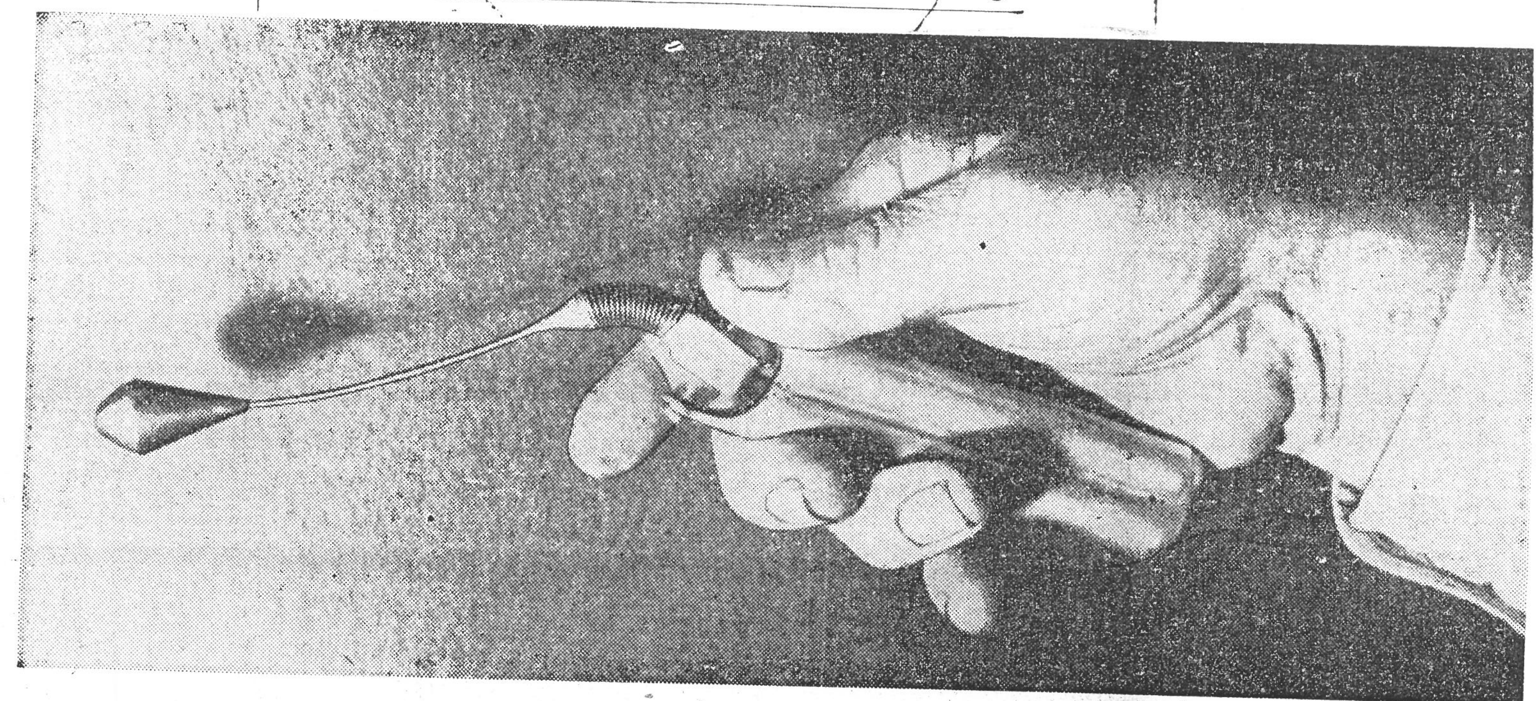
In digging the well, a large amount of solid rock was encountered, but at the 245-foot level, the drillers halted in what Cameron said was the major stream. Water had been encountered from the 40-foot level downward.

Although Cameron had indicated hot water in the vicinity, the Fern Valley Mutual Water Company well is pumping icy cold water.

Humber says it is too early to determine just how much water can be pumped from the well.

However, with a daily need during the summer months of nearly 200,000 gallons, he feels the well can provide most of that amount. The water company will continue to use its gravity flow supply from both Strawberry and Tahquitz Creeks.

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—Daily News photos by Helen Brush.

DOODLEBUG OR DISCOVERY? Inventor Verne L. Cameron says it dips where there's underground water. Science shrugs off theory that subterranean streams emit radiation, lumps device with "water witch" willow wand which Cameron says he studied for 19 years and developed into "sound, scientific" water detection device. He gets wells from gadget, razzberry from science.



PREHISTORIC "BLOWOUT" formed well in Cameron's backyard, his water compass located it, he says. Opposition says it's done with geology, or luck; never with gadgets.



"WITCHING" A RIVER. Cameron traces underground waterwa[y] below his kitchen. Caltech disapproves, declares there's no know[n] scientific way to do it . . . "Water is where you find it."

Factors in water finding discussed: 'witch' vs. science

By VERN PARTLOW

Note Date

I have made great strides in the 6 yrs. since this

When all the strange occupations hereabouts are laid end to end the job of the "water witch" will loom head and shoulders above the rest . . .

A "water witch," in case you didn't know it, is one who locates wells by a scientifically unapproved method, and thereby hangs one of the major controversies in water hungry Southern California.

There are those who swear by the "witching" or "doodlebug" method, which involves carrying a willow or hazel wand or similar gadget with spring in it until it bends down where underground water is supposed to be.

And there are those who scorn such methods as hangovers of superstition, aided and abetted by a layman's knowledge of geology plus auto-suggestion — and the scorners, who have approved science on their side, declare no one can do more than judge the "probabilities" of where water will be, using geology, topography, rainfall and other commonplace factors in their reasoning.

Take Verne L. Cameron—he's what science calls a "water witch," but he's brought in thousands of wells in the last 19 years, he says, using his own unorthodox theories and instruments, based on "the principles which make a willow twig bend over subterranean water."

Cameron, who's 48, graying, and in dead earnest about it, lives at 541 E. Banning ave., Compton, where he operates a back porch defense factory, making military radio parts for Uncle Sam when he's not out telling well drillers where to dig for ranchers, water companies and an occasional military reservation.

Cameron doesn't care for the appellation of "witch," for he says his instruments — delicately balanced secret alloy plumb — bobs hinged by ball bearings to a spring and handle—actually have an affinity for the earth's network of underground waterways.

It is his idea that subterranean streams emanate a subtle, uncharted "force" which pull at a willow or hazel twig, and especially at his "refined instruments" which he developed over a period of 19 years of experimentation.

This H^2O hunter admits that gadgets such as his are frowned on by the California Institute of Technology, the United States Geological Survey and most hardheaded well drillers, but he says he's a hydrologist and dare the experts to investigate his findings.

"If you could find my ideas and devices in their musty textbooks, I wouldn't have anything new, would I?" he demands. "I'm making science. And they're making it tough for me."

Cameron tried the willow branch technique 19 years ago when everything else failed to bring water on his homestead at Escondido, he said, and the "pull twisted the bark in my hands."

To back up his success story, Cameron displayed letters from satisfied bankers, ranchers, movie stars, factory officials and quartermaster officer Albert O. Bruce, who paid off for a dozen wells at Camp Morena in El Centro and at Hunter Liggett military reservation.

He cited with evident satisfaction the portion of the letter which declared him to be "reliable" and "eminently satisfactory." Apparently he felt that the army should get together with the United States Geological Survey, and the men who got out Uncle Sam's water supply paper No. 416, entitled: "The Divining Rod, a History of Water Witching."

Then he got down his tools—a water "compass" to locate underground streams, and a water "scale" to measure its volume—and proceeded to trace with chalk the course of several way down rivers beneath his home.

To make his case watertight, Cameron cited his daily trips through Los Angeles, San Diego and Ventura counties, staking out wells which he declared develop 95 per cent of the time as he predicts they will.

But what do the well drillers say?

KFEYE Witness tonight at 10:15 will present spokesmen for both sides in a controversy as old as well digging—the question of whether "water witches" locate underground sources because of the willow wand they employ or in spite of it.

Science decries "water witching" as superstition and auto-suggestion, the public divides vehemently on the question, and program director Bob Purcell, in cooperation with the Daily News, will present speakers for both schools of thought, including Verne L. Cameron, whose "water compass" is based upon the willow wand theory.

They admit a good bit of "business" gets tossed their way by water "witches" employed by property owners who want a little experting done, but they profess no personal faith in the diviners.

"In the valleys around here," opined one hardheaded skeptic, a 'witch' has got to strike water nine times out of 10 unless he puts his stake in concrete."

The drillers assert the only way to figure the "probabilities" of underground water is to watch the surface terrain, geological factors, rainfall and natural barriers.

"The 'witches' do this, too," one driller said. "Sometimes they do it subconsciously, sometimes deliberately. But they do it."

Out at California Institute of Technology a scientific disapprover of "witching" summed it up:

"Whether you call it dowsing, dipping, divining or 'witching,' or give it a pseudo-scientific prestige, it's still without any proven basis in known scientific fact.

"Many things I do not know. This I can state unequivocally. There is no known reason to assume any affinity between underground water and twigs, rods, sticks, stones or alloys.

"Water is where you find it, and you find it the hard way, usually . . . by taking into consideration geological, topographical and rainfall factors. Then you dig . . . and hope."

Other spokesmen for orthodox methods had a good word to say for geophysics—a process wherein electrical energy is transmitted between stations and the resistance of the geological formation measured to detect water, which is a super conductor.

But the average guy wanting a well—cheap and in a hurry—usually leaves it to a driller's practised eye, they agreed—or else up and calls in a waterwise "witch" of the twig or gadget school.

And that's how water wells are born.